

Frequently Asked Questions About Student Data

How do states use student data?

States use student data to provide parents, teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders with the information they need to make informed decisions and better prepare students for success. Common indicators include student attendance, demographic information, assessment results, and English language learner/special education status. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, states report aggregate student achievement results by subgroups, such as an entire school, grade level or racial/ethnic subgroup. Individual student results are not publicly reported or shared with the U.S. Department of Education.

How is Smarter Balanced different?

The Smarter Balanced Assessment System will measure student achievement and growth toward college and career readiness in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. Results from the assessments will give parents and students accurate information about whether students are on track to graduate high school ready for college and the workplace. In addition, teachers will have access to a digital library of resources and tools to tailor instruction based on the needs of individual students.

Why is Smarter Balanced collecting student data?

In order to maintain the assessment system, Smarter Balanced will collect a minimum amount of student information on behalf of member states. For example, the Consortium will analyze assessment results to ensure that the test questions are sound and that the assessments accurately predict college and career readiness. This work is necessary to ensure that the assessments are accurate and fair for all students.

What type of information will Smarter Balanced collect?

In order to make sure the assessments are accurate and fair for all students, states will submit the following information to Smarter Balanced:

- An identification number (the Consortium recommends that this be different from the state's
 official unique student identifier so that only the state can link back to a student's official
 education record);
- Race/ethnicity, gender, grade level, school attended;
- Student eligibility for English language development services, or special education services provided to the student:
- Student eligibility for Title I compensatory programs;
- Smarter Balanced test scores, achievement levels, and responses to test questions.

If a state elects to have Smarter Balanced generate reports of student assessment results, the consortium also will collect student name and date of birth. States may choose to manage that function through another organization. In either case, states can impose guidelines to safeguard those data.



What information won't Smarter Balanced collect?

Smarter Balanced will never collect identifying information (such as student name and date of birth) unless specifically directed to do so by a member state. Further, Smarter Balanced will not collect information unnecessary to the assessment system, such as:

- Names of parents:
- Student or parent email address;
- Telephone numbers;
- Student or parent Social Security numbers;
- Parent or student addresses:
- Parent or student medical information.

What information will Smarter Balanced share with the U.S. Department of Education?

Smarter Balanced will not share student-level information with the U.S. Department of Education. Further, use of the Smarter Balanced assessments will result in no changes to state reporting to the U.S. Department of Education. States will only share aggregate student data—the same information required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In addition, the agreement between Smarter Balanced and the U.S. Department of Education states that the Consortium must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well as state and local requirements regarding privacy. FERPA, along with three other federal statutes, prohibits the federal government from establishing a database with personally identifiable student information.

Will Smarter Balanced release personally identifiable information?

No. Under limited circumstances such as for research studies deemed important by states in the consortium, Smarter Balanced may provide access to student data that have been altered so that students' identities cannot be recognized. Requests for this type of information will be reviewed by member states and each state must individually approve any release of data.

Will Smarter Balanced sell student information?

No. Smarter Balanced, member states, and districts cannot and will not sell student information as prohibited by federal laws like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Does the Common Core require states to collect 400 data points on each student?

No. The Common Core State Standards do not require any data collection.

Is FERPA the only law protecting student privacy?

No. While FERPA sets limits on how personally identifiable information can be accessed and shared, states also have their own policies and regulations, and many have state laws that parallel FERPA designed to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of data. Virtually all states also have laws that address data security and security breaches.

How will Smarter Balanced ensure that student records are not hacked or lost?

Smarter balanced follows industry best practice for securing the storage and transmission of student records. These measures include, but are not limited to:

- All student data are encrypted when in transit and when stored in an accessible data system;
- Data backups are encrypted and physically secured;
- Audit logs are kept of user activity including management of accounts, granting of permissions, proctoring of exams and generation of reports;
- Smarter Balanced never accepts social security numbers for any individual;
- Data centers are physically secured against unauthorized access.